

A photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground, a small stream flows over rocks, surrounded by dense green vegetation and fallen tree trunks. The background is filled with tall, thin trees with green foliage. The text "The Naturalist's Notebook" is overlaid in a large, white, serif font with a black outline.

The Naturalist's Notebook

03/22/2021

Calkins Nature Area



Brachiopod Fossil From Creek



Brook Stickleback From Creek



Fresh Ice on the Prairie



Bonnie Enjoying the Sun

Trail Conditions:

Fair

Trails continue to be a bit muddy in places. Warm temperatures have melted nearly all of the snow in the timber and pooling has occurred in low lying areas that don't get direct sunlight. Upland trails, prairie trails, are in great shape.

Things To Do:

Wetland Wildlife Viewing, Listen for Spring Songs, Tour the Nature Center Museum

1. The wetland behind Calkins Nature Area has some great wildlife viewing at this time. Migratory waterfowl, songbirds, and even the occasional beaver or otter can be spotted swimming through the pond.
2. Breeding season is here for many songbirds. Their calls can be heard throughout the forest. Take a hike along our trails and tally how many different bird calls you can hear.
3. Want to bring the family out to the Calkins Nature Area museum? Give us a call for your own family tour! 641-648-9878.

Wildlife Sightings

Rankings are based on seasonal commonality

Common— black capped chickadee, white breasted nuthatch, house sparrow, house finch, dark eyed junco, northern cardinal, downy woodpecker, blue jay, red bellied woodpecker, eastern fox squirrel, eastern cottontail rabbit

Somewhat Common— red winged blackbird, cedar waxwing, common grackle, bald eagle, raccoon, opossum, groundhog, american robin

Unusual— None this week

Rare— tundra swans, trumpeter swans, snow gees, greater white fronted geese, pileated woodpecker, north american river otter

Spring Wildflowers Right Around the Corner



Warm temperatures mean the arrival of many ephemeral wildflowers in the forests and prairies around Hardin County. In late March to early April, when the soil is still cool and moisture is low, but days begin to lengthen, we see skunk cabbage, pasque flower, snow trillium, and hepatica start to emerge. These species have a short flowering window. They've evolved to take advantage of sunlight coming through the forest canopy when there are no leaves on the trees. The plants cannot be shaded out since they've gone through their yearly cycle before the trees even develop leaves. Our earliest blooming flowers also tend to be our rarest, most sensitive species. Calkins Nature Area and Tower Rock Park just south of Steamboat harbor a few of the species listed above. It truly depends on snow pack, soil temperatures, air temperatures, and day length as to when a particular flower species blooms. Predicting bloom times can be quite difficult because of this.

As we approach mid April different species will begin to appear. Bloodroot, dutchmen's breeches, squirrel corn, wild violet, wild ginger, marsh marigold, and many other flowers thrive when the days are much longer and temperatures much warmer. Beautiful flowers like the Virginia bluebell can also be observed in groves as far as the eye can see. One of our greatest places for viewing bluebells is at Reece Park at the southern end of Hardin County. Just remember, don't pick them because they are a sensitive species and should always remain in their natural state.

Late April into early May are when we often observe our greatest diversity of wildflowers. The forest floors are blanketed with different species. Jack-in-the-pulpit, nodding trillium, bedstraw, sweet cicely, bellwort, green dragon, wild lettuce, Jacob's ladder, columbine, and a number of others can be found throughout the forests of Calkins Nature Area at this time. If you're interested in wildflowers consider purchasing "Wildflowers of Iowa Woodlands" for the most comprehensive assessment of when certain species will emerge. We use it as a resource when leading forest hikes and it often assists us when we are stumped on identification.

Summer Day Camp Registration

Registration opens 8 am on Wednesday, April 14th.

If you would like to have it on your calendar, these are the tentative dates for the camps at Calkins Nature Area. Please remember you will sign up for the grade your child is going **INTO** for the fall of 2021.

We will be limiting number of students and shortening the week at each camp for COVID-19 safety protocol purposes.

Masks will be absolutely required for the safety of our staff and other kids (part of camp is inside especially on bad weather days, so make sure your kids have masks). If you have further questions, please contact us at 641-648-9878.



Caterpillar Camps (Entering K or 1st)

June 10-12

June 24-26

Sunfish Camps (Entering 2nd or 3rd)

June 17-19

June 28-30

Mallard Camps (Entering 4th or 5th)

June 7-9

June 14-17

June 21-24

A photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground, there is a shallow stream with a sandy and rocky bed, some fallen branches, and green moss. The water is slightly rippled. The background is filled with tall, thin trees with green foliage, suggesting a spring or summer setting. The lighting is bright, and the overall atmosphere is natural and serene.

Upcoming Programs:

Lunch and Learn Program

12 pm to 12:30 pm on March 27th

At Estes Park in Iowa Falls

Join us at Estes Park in Downtown Iowa Falls on Saturday March 27th from 12 pm to 12:30 pm for a Socially Distanced Lunch and Learn! Bring your lunch to the park, take a seat, and learn about some unique wildlife with Calkins' Nature Area staff members. The topic for the program is all about foxes and coyotes. Foxes and coyotes are most active throughout the spring because it is their breeding season. Learn about the behavior of our wild canines, some of the key features that make foxes and coyotes different, and how we utilize predator hunting and trapping to control the booming populations of these sly carnivores.

General Things to Remember:

- Reptile room and nature center facilities remain closed.
- Outdoor facilities are available sunrise to sunset, 7 days a week now that we have hit the spring season.
- Seeing normally nocturnal animals out during the day is COMMON this time of year. Racoons and opossums are emerging from their winter sleep and actively search for food during the warmest hours of the day.
- The snow has uncovered some dead deer on our trails from this winter, please stay away from those as best as possible.